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ABSTRACT

Although school administrators are not usually thought of as revolutionaries, they are in fact deeply and constructively engaged with concerns that must be called revolutionary. The American school system has grown amazingly since 1920, when only 20 percent of 17 -year-olds attended public schools, compared with nearly 80 percent today. Nearly one third of the entire population is enrolled in public and private institutions, and there has been a striking increase in the number of black students. Educational research has also greatly increased. The need for finance reform is receiving increasing attention and new ways of financing public education are being examined. Some of the questions to be considered in developing a fair and adequate educational finance system are 1) How and to what extent should we seek to diminish the wealth-based disparities among school districts within a state? 2) Assuming that such equalization among districts should be sought, should educational finance reform also seek to equalize expenditures among the states? 3) If intrastate equalization is desired, will local supplementation of resources be permitted? and 4) How can urban districts obtain the extra resources they need to deal with their special problems? (MBM)

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SPEAKER: The Honorable S. P. Marland, Jr., U. S. Commissioner of Education, Washington, D. C.

TOPIC: THE SLOW PACE OF REVOLUTION

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I suspect that some of us who have gathered here in Atlantic City for this great annual convention have come with a sense of uneasiness, perhaps even a feeling of abashment. Can it really be that this ancient rococo seaside resort, whose boardwalk and monumental old hotels suggest another century --- can this be the place where important ideas about the most vital educational matters will surface? For that matter, are we the people to generate those ideas? Or are we out of place and out of date? Are the really important things happening elsewhere, involving those more attuned to the much-publicized revolutionary forces of modern America?

If such questions have not crossed your minds, then I would be very much surprised. As a man who has been engaged in educational matters for more than 30 years, I have asked myself whether I am capable of understanding the situation today, whether I can cope with the educational expecta tions of present-day America, and participate effectively in formulating policies for the future.

A sense of defensiveness, it seems to me, would be easy to explain. We are mature adults when the stress is on the future, and when hope is placed with extravagant emphasis on youth. You remember the slogan of a few years ago: Don't trust anyone over 30! It must have been something of a shock when the author of that phrase turned 30 himself -- and presumably collapsed into an evil senility on the instant. We belong to education's establishment when a large and vocal segment of the population abhors the very term establishment. And we pursue the day-to-day routine, faithful to the task that has absorbed our working careers, when the cry is for excitement, change, and -- yes -- for revolution now! How can we possibly become revolutionaries?

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The readiest answer is, of course, that we should leave such notions strictly alone, that revolution is not for us, that we are gathered here to discuss the management of the schools, and the price of chalk and erasers and --- anonymously --- buses.

But I think that would be the wrong answer, and for the long-range purposes of education a disastrous answer. Because such an attitude would suggest that we should have no contact with the powerful forces for change that are at work in this country, that we should ignore events that transforming America.

I also think that would be the wrong answer for the very simple reason that it would not accord with the facts of the situation. For the inescapable truth is that we in education, convened here in Atlantic City are the most powerful force for change in America today, and we are smack in the center of the contemporary upheaval that is deeply affecting American social, cultural, and personal values.

The danger is that we may fail to recognize the centrality of our role. We may fail to realize that the very meaning of the word revolution has changed. For whatever our age or political coloration, we are prisoners of the past if we think of revolution in terms of dramatic and instantaneous change, accomplishing with dispatch a total transformation of the old into the new.

We have all read articles reciting conditions that can only add up, in the views of the perpetually dismayed authors, to social and moral calcification. America, they conclude, is a citadel of reaction. America is incapable of really meaningful change because, they argue, powerful cliques of government and business conspire to put down with brutal indifference the aspirations of the masses.

All of which is, I declare, rubbish. The kindest thing to be said is that the times have passed these social commentators by. Their views are really not of the 1970's, but of conditions as they existed possibly as late as the 1950's. Perhaps they have been too busily engaged in refining their thesis, in polishing their condemnatory phrases to the absolute pitch of perfection, to notice that their basic assumptions are no longer valid.

Perhaps they find this professional despondency necessary as a psychological shield, but the fact is that the revolutionary process --- perhaps evolutionary is the better word to use --- but by an name the process of change is proceeding in America and the country that we live in today is not the America of 1950, not even the America of 1960. Indeed, today, in 1972, the spirit of reform in education is so strong, so insistent, so clearly present in our behavior as education leaders as to leave no doubt that we are engaged with the future.

Let me quote a contemporary social observer, Jean-Francois Revel, a Frenchman, a philosopher, and an enthusiastic student of revolution. In a new book, Without Marx or Jesus, he write, "Today in America --- The child of European Imperialism --- a new revolution is rising. Is the revolution of our time.... It is the only revolution that ....joins culture, economic and technological power, and a total affirmation of liberty for all..."

Revel wrote the book in order to re-examine the very concept of revolution. He believed that the traditional view had been badly mauled by the events of the sixties, by new phenomena which surprised and upset the social-overturn theories of the classic left-wing philosophy. The social condition in the United States had improved dramatically in those years, indicating to Revel that the cause of humanity would best be served through efforts at reforming rather than destroying the system.

"The whole idea of opposition between reform and revolution," he writes, "must be largely revised. What matters, in reality, is the ability effectively to bring about change---the fact that society itself changes."

Revel thus sees America---as do I---as having advanced to a condition unprecented in history, We in this country have come to a point of cultural,political,and social development at which reform is in fact revolution---the only kind of revolution possible in a society far too complex to be changed explosively, and in a single direction. I believe we have matured to the point where we recognize that constuctive and enduring change will not be brought about as a consequence of a blinding inspiration in a dark cellar, but only as a consequence of patience and perseverance in dealing with things the way they actually are, and attempting to move things forward a few notches at a time.

Social regeneration demands more than criticism and more than self-righteous anger. John Gardner made the point when he said,"Reality is supremely boring to most social critics, they are extremely reluctant to think about the complex and technical processes by which society functions, and, in the end, their unwillingness to grapple with those processes defeats them"

There are many legitimate claimants to the title of revolutionary in our society today: The Blacks, who have awakened us to the hideous injustice and the frustrating deprivations of their lives; the other minorities---the Spanish-speaking, the Indians---who have reached a final point of exasperation and now properly demand that the injustices worked against them cease, and that their grievances be redressed; the students who are particularly worthy of recognition, as are the feminists, and those who plead for attention to the environment and to the deterioration of our urban centers.

But this many-faceted struggle to invent a superior future really has but one consistent focus --- education. The most convincing evidence of our progress during the last two decades will be found in the schools, testifying to an amazing willingness on the part of the men and women of education to grapple effectively with the recalcitrant social processes which press around us. Americans seek many and varied improvements in their standard of living --- in housing, environment, job opportunities, social justice, but they see these improvements coming to themselves and to their children basically through education --- through the schools that you operate, through the opportunities that learning alone will open.

If it were a question of justice alone, surely it would strike us as unjust that the American educational system should be the target of half-developed and unexamined charges.

What system, we may reasonably ask, has been so productive? What system has undertaken to equip so many millions with serviceable intellectual and occupational skills, accomplishing the task, moreover, with generally satisfactory results, not only in our own land but in our selfless extensions abroad?

The growth alone of the school system is amazing. In 1920, at the start of the generation now leading education, only 20 percent of 17 year olds attended public school in America. Today nearly 80 percent of 17 year olds are in school. Most modern European countries range probably from 25 to 35 percent in this age bracket, a fact that nettles M. Revel. "Only one Frenchman in 10," he observes," finds it possible, economically, to advance beyond the equivalent of a grade-school education: which is to say that intellectually France functions as though it had a population of only five million people," (when compared to United States practices.)

In September, 1971 the Office of Education calculated that 1971-72 enrollment in public and private institutions would increase for the 27th consecutive year to a record 60.2 million --- nearly a third of the entire population. Indeed, while the general population has grown by half since World War II, the student population has doubled, and college enrollment more than tripled, and much of the enrollment growth in higher education, particularly in most recent years, has been accounted for by an increase in the number of minority students.

Revel notes that at the time he was writing his book there were 434,000 black students in American universities out of a total black population of 22 million --- a ratio higher than that of <u>all</u> French university students of all races to France's 50 million inhabitants. And the same pattern holds for the rest of Western Europe.

If anyone doubts that American education is in the midst of a revolution, I ask that he think about what the chances of a black student getting into college were even five years ago. Revel's figure of 434,000 is a little out of date. The October, 1970 census placed black college enrollment at 522,000, compared with only 274,000 in October, 1965 --- an increase of nearly 100 percent in only five years.

Think about educational research. The Office of Education alone is investing $168 million in research in fiscal year 1972, and the President is requesting Congress to increase the amount to $376 million in FY 1973, including $150 million for the National Institute of Education and $100 million for the National Foundation for Higher Education. I grant you that even combined with education research expenditures at the state and local levels, we are not putting the emphasis on research that ideally we could and should, but the contrast is extraordinary with, say, 20 years ago when as superintendent of one of the wealthiest communities in the United States, I put in a $5,000 budget item for educational research. The chairman of the Board of Finance of that community looked at me in shock. "Research!" said he, "We're not going to have any of that around here." This was only 20 years ago. Education, I say, is a fast-moving stream and even those of us who are swimming in it fail to realize how fast it is flowing.

Certainly one of the most profound movements now beginning to gain momentum is the entire matter of educational finance reform, a subject thrust to the forefront of national concern by the Serrano decision of last October. Some believe that this decision by the California Supreme Court striking down the State's educational finance system as unconstitutional will in time be recognized to be as significant as Brown vs. Topeka Board of Education in 1954. I agree with this assessment, and find it equally overdue, and equally elusive of quick resolution.

As President Nixon said in his State of the Union address, we must not only continue to address ourselves to the solution of the difficult and enduring problems of education---inequality, ineffectiveness, irrelevance---but we must also quickly devise new ways in which education is going to be funded. We have got to decide how we are going to keep the schools open and pay their operating costs, issues of terrible immediacy for hundreds of districts where funds are running short and the traditional source of new revenues---the real estate tax---is apparently wrung dry. As the President noted, this tax more than doubled in the 10 years from 1960 to 1970 and in the process became one of the most oppressive and discriminatory of all revenue measures.

Its days as the principal financial prop of education are surely numbered.

We cannot be certain at this moment whether the property tax will in fact be eliminated--my personal inclination---or whether funds will continue to be collected through this tax but pooled at the State level for redistribution to the districts rather than expended in the districts where the money is collected.

In any case, it is the apportionment of the funds, rather than the method of collection that is at issue. A four-year OE study, the National Educational Finance Project, was completed last fall under the direction of Dr. Roe Johns of the University of Florida. It documents extraordinary disparities in wealth per pupil from local district to local district and from State to State. The wealthiest States in general outspend the poorest by a per pupil ratio of two to one, which is bad enough. But the disparities within States are even greater, with some districts spending three or four times per pupil the amount spent by neighboring communities.

There seems little question that correcting these imbalances will require that the principal responsibility for financing education be shifted from the local to the State level. But how we will ultimately accomplish this is, as we are all aware, a question of utmost complexity and sensitivity.

Compounding an answer that satisfies our financial needs while meeting our educational requirements will require a rare combination of wit and intelligence and plain perseverence.

The President intends to find that answer. He has made clear that it is his earnest intention to bring the full powers of the Federal establishment to bear on this problem of finance---not to impose a decision from above but to seek as far as possible a consensus of views representative of the entire community of Americans. Consequently, massive studies of the finance problem have been launched by the Treasury Department, by the Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Regulations, by the President's Commission on School Finance, and by the Office of Education.

Within the Office of Education we are preparing for a series of discussion conferences among public and private interests as a very important first step in illuminating the issues involved in the finance question. We intend to consult with special interest groups such as the American Association of School Administrators and a great range of additional educational organizations; public interest groups representative of State and local government, business orgaizations, labor unions, and social action groups. We want to include in these conferences civil rights activists and Federal officials who are thoroughly familiar with the administrative and social implications of the school finance situation, as well as economists, political leaders, and legal authorities with professional competence in these areas.

These meetings will start right now, here in Atlantic City, and continue throughout the spring and summer, and we hope that out of them will come the collective wisdom and common agreement needed to produce a system of financing that will meet the three broad goals stipulated by the President: first, property tax relief: second, fair and adequate financing for education: third, preservation of local control.

The last of these three --- local control --- is really not a negotiable issue in the eyes of the President or the Office of Education. For the President has said that Federal policy in educational finance must be "consistent with the principle of preserving the control by local school boards over local schools." It seems inevitable --- and on the whole desirable --- that the national debate over educational support will lead to a vastly enlarged Federal share, perhaps as much as 30 to 40 percent of the total bill. And, as always, new money from the Federal Government will quickly suggest to the minds of some a new threat of control from Washington.

It is my firm belief that no such threat exists. Because money, from whatever source, is not the essence of control in education. The real issues at the local level are children, and teachers, and new and better teaching and learning techniques. Indeed, relieving the local authorities of the burden of money raising, of jousting with the State legislatures over financial matters, of planning and carrying out levies, referenda, and bond issues --- ending all this will actually have the effect of increasing local energy, time, and power to build and operate superior educational programs, to deal with the problems of the disadvantaged, the handicapped, the gifted, and to design and carry out first-rate programs of teaching and learning. Finance and education are not inextricably intertwined, and shifting the major part of the fiscal burden to the States can only have, in my view, strikingly beneficial results --- relieving locals of time-consuming fund raising, giving new assurances of equitable support, and helping significantly to produce a superior brand of education.

The second goal, property tax relief, while it concerns us as citizens and taxpayers, is really not our professional concern as educators, and I will leave its complexities to my Federal colleagues in the Department of the Treasury and others capable of dealing with its manifold subtleties. But I would like to mention here, in very broad outline, some of the questions that we must indeed concern ourselves with intimately --- the issues related to a fair and adequate educational finance system --- the most equitable and most efficient ways of expending the public funds entrusted to us.

First, how and to what extend should we seek to diminish the wealth-based disparities among school districts within a State?

As the President noted, this issue has been given particular emphasis by the recent court rulings in California, Texas, New Jersey, and Minnesota that wealth-based State educational finance systems are unconstitutional. My belief, as I have said, is that we would best be served by a totally new tax at the State level. One that would be far more responsive to economic change as well as far more progressive than the real estate tax. And we must keep in mind that any attempt at a flat per-pupil allocation would be wrong in itself and end up creating new inequities not less damaging than those it would cure. Special needs, for example, must be taken into account, such as those of the disadvantaged, the gifted, and the handicapped. And we must also consider the problems of the cities and rural areas where higher per pupil costs require just compensatory funding. A flat application of the Serrano Principle of total equalization could wreak financial havoc in a city such as New York, for example, where educational revenues under such an arrangement could actually be diminished from present levels by $100 or more per child when we level down. Many other cities are in the same predicament where relatively high per pupil costs have been achieved. Yet, how far can we level up and still obey Serrano?

SECOND, ASSUMING THAT SUCH EQUALIZATION AMONG DISTRICTS SHOULD BE SOUGHT, SHOULD EDUCATIONAL FINANCE REFORM ALSO SEEK TO EQUALIZE EXPENDITURES AMONG THE STATES?

Wide disparities exist among the States, of course, New York spends approximately $1,400 per child each year, while Alabama spends barely $400. Some of the gap is attributable to cost differentials and some is the result of different levels of educational service--but a considerable portion is due to simple difference in wealth. Some effort must be made at least to modify these differences---but as we consider this problem we should be aware of the tremendous cost involved in achieving even partial equalization among the States. The interstate issue will, I believe, be confronted eventually.

IF INTRASTATE EQUALIZATION IS DESIRED, WILL LOCAL SUPPLEMENTATION OF RESOURCES BY PERMITTED?

I recognize the intrincate problems associated with this question, principally haveing to do with a potential reestablishment of the wealth-based disparities that are the bane of the present arrangement. Yet I would nevertheless argue that local residents should be permitted to build upon the State-determined par, because such local initiative is wholly consistent with the best traditions of this Nation and because the people should retain the right to influence to some degree the quality of their children's education, provided they can do so without penalizing thereby the prospects of other children.

We are not seeking absolut uniformity through this exercise in tax reform as much as we are seeking to end the wretched deprivation some children are experiencing through gross fiscal disparities. Yet the add-on question remains a lively issue for the National Debate.

HOW CAN URBAN DISTRICTS OBTAIN THE EXTRA RESOURCES THEY NEED TO DEAL WITH THEIR SPECIAL PROBLEMS?

As we know, America's urban centers are threatened by eroding tax bases, exceptional costs, and large numbers of minorities and poor whose special educational requirements are amply documented. In addressing the question of special provisions for central cities, we must also recognize the closely related problems of the nonpublic schools. These schools are closing in large numbers due to a lack of operating funds and their total collapse, which is not inconceivable, would impact with special severity on the large urban public school systems, The constitutional restraints in this area, it goes without saying, are imposing. Hence another grave issue for the debate.

Let me close these remarks by rephrasing my opening theme: We in education gathered here in Atlantic City may not look like revolutionaries and we may not act like revolut revolutionaries---But no intelligent person can question that we are deeply and constructively engaged with concerns that must---by any standards---be called revolutionary.

We are now, and have been for the past two decades, working to reshape and reform the largest social institution in the country. Both in terms of money and in terms of people.

We are now striving to effect through the schools the regeneration of vast segments of our population, bringing both justice and opportunity to millions of blacks, Indians, Chicanos, Spanish-speaking, and poor whites---the millions left largely untouched and unhelped through prior generations of our American History.

And we are now delving into economic problems and equality problems on a scale unmatched in our history, seeking to redesign Federal,State, and local finance policies that will affect substantially the educati nal prospects of millions of American children and that have attracted the earnest attention of virtually all Americans.

And I will pay us all the compliment of saying that I do expect that working in close cooperation with financial managers and analysts we shall overturn the system and produce a new one---not by means of the lightning stroke or the fell swoop of genius, but through the usual difficult, painstaking, and thoroughly effective means we have always employed as educators to bring about change.

But in the same breath in which I predict this measure of success in financial reform, let me echo the warning of another wise Frenchman, Alexis de Tocqueville, a worthy commentator on the American experience.

He wrote: "The evil which was suffered patiently as inevitable seems unendurable as soon as the idea of escaping from it crosses men's minds. All the abuses then removed call attention to those that remain, and they now appear more galling, The evil it is true, has become less, but sensibility to it has become more acute."

We may be absolutely certain, then, that try as we may we shall never satisfy the American appetite for learning because as the evils subside, the sensibilities will increase, and educational progress will thus always produce discontent in fairly exact proportion to the growth of intellectual satisfaction. Let us therefore abide in the full knowledge that a splendid discontent is the continuing condition of education in America. A condition that we have wrought, and that is a mark of our effectiveness.

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